

DALMA

DAUGHTER

OF

THE

MILL



CHARLES W. CUNO



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*Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill, is she.
Was e'er a maid so fair?*

DALMAR

Daughter of the Mill



By Charles M. Cuno



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DENVER

Let your word be criticism, not comment;
seek out merit and praise it,
but be not too sparing
of condemnation,
for, inasmuch as you
have been just,
call me your
friend.

Dalmar

DAUGHTER OF THE MILL



DALMAR

Daughter of the Mill

CANTO I.



HERE fields of growing wheat
The babbling brook's sides meet,
Amid the gentle, swaying trees,
Where bending bough, with pinon leaves,
Doth mark the fancy of the breeze
By splashes in the laughing stream;
Where moss and grassy carpet seem
To spread green tapestries, a bed
For violets blue and roses red
That wild 'mid Nature's vistas grow;

Where twitt'ring song and warbling low
Doth tell the song-bird's hidden nest;
Where butterflies sail to and fro;
The flower cups, in lazy quest
Of sweets they rob; and lying low
Around the lazy millsite lake,
The handsome lilies silent take
Their queenly rest, just out of reach;
Where almost in the mill-race breach
There grows the saucy daffodil,—
There stands a mill.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Green ivies grace the rambling sides,
That seem as though some fairy sprites,
In caprice of their happy life,
Did build, 'mid song and laughter rife.
This rustic mill, 'twould seem, as they
Did fashion thus of yellow clay,
And then did pelt with cobbles round,—
In changing mood,—that strewed the ground,
Till morning's sun that chased them 'way
Exposed thus strangely to the day,
All plastered 'round with cobbles gray,
Its mimic grandeur's mock array;
In outline small, the turret tall,
E'en lattice, parapet and all,
In miniature, the rustic wall
Of mediæval castle grand.
And e'en the setting of the land
Would lend to fancy's end its faint
Enchantment to this scene so quaint,
Did not the millwheel, iron bound,
In creaking song, thus 'round and 'round,
Betray the magic Elfin skill.
The castle turns but to a mill.

Above the millwheel's creaking noise
There comes the music of a voice.
The miller gay doth sing all day
His mill-song's merry roundelay.
The throbbing of the mill-stone's grind
Now goes before, now lags behind.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

The shimm'ring millwheel's splashing beat
In measured cadence oft repeat,
Doth frequent seem as though it fain
Would mock the miller's glad refrain;
Again to drown the happy sound
With grinding rattle, 'round and 'round;
And then to chime in with the rhyme
And beat the cadence of the time.
But ne'er the miller heeds the noise.
Now low his note, now high his voice;
Now dies his lay in caprice 'way,
Now soft, now loud, in tenor key.
And ever thus, the whole day long,
'Tis this, the burden of his song:

"Hola! A miller born am I,
And e'er a miller will I be.
For riches have I yet to sigh,
Or yet the rich man's luxury.
I toil all day and toil for aye;
At evening's close I take my rest.
I have no care; my simple fare
Is all my fancy doth request.
When morning's sun doth light the skies,
It beckons me to toil arise,
But evening's soft and mellow light
Doth find me at my fireside;
And ne'er a care doth there abide.
My toil has left me, for at night

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

I am a king. And when its race
The millwheel ends, and when their pace,
Their madd'ning pace, the mill-stones cease,
I dream my dreams in silent peace.
My mill doth turn by fairy hand
To turret, wall and castle grand.
And in my arm-chaired throne-stool place,
Just by the cheery fire's space,
I rule, forsooth, with iron hand.
I muster 'round a millsack band
Of vassals from the mill without
And cry, 'What ho! thou minion, Clout!
Come, Clout! and do my bidding! Here!
Bring forth the wassail cheer!'
My daughter takes the queenly place.
With princess airs, her pretty face
Doth grace the evening festive board;
And from without, the white-faced horde
Doth seem to crowd the open door
As though in homage to their lord.

"Then drink, lads, to the castle mill,
When night is here and all is still.
Ho for the time when eve doth bring
My realm! For 't night I am a king!"

And stranger still, this man, this mill,
This mixture quaint, this miller king,
This man content, though good or ill
The cycles of the morrows bring,

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

This miller whose eccentric mien
Fain fits the magic of the scene,
Doth add another queerness still
To mark the quaintness of the mill.
'Tis this, his pastime of the night,
The miller's joy, his great delight,
To gather from the nearby inn
His cronies three, and safe within
The shelter of his castle mill
To move with patient, silent skill,
The chessmen o'er the checkered plane,
Thus each with each, with each again.
'Mid scowl and frown and solemn way
And measured move, they silent play
The cycle of the patient game
Till midnight strikes the new day's name.

Then what the cost, if won or lost?
'Tis all the playing of the game.
The miller, at this hour's sign,
Doth bring from cellar of his wine
And pours to each his portion fair;
Then all, their glasses high in air,
Await the signal of their host,
As speaks he thus his merry toast:—

“Then drink, lads, to the castle mill,
When night is here and all is still.
Ho for the time when eve doth bring
My realm! For 't night I am a king!”

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

And oft, when evening's sun doth paint
The West with crimson tints that faint
Around each scrolléd cloud doth seem
To weave the sunlight's haloed sheen,
There comes, forsooth, a sweeter lay.
And frequent from the turret gray,
Whence window blinds and dainty lace,
That truer to its castle grace,
Fain tells a home, a gentler skill,
And marks the dwelling 'midst the mill,
A maid doth gaze upon the scene,
Or from the door in happy mien
Doth watch, with bare head, careless grace,
The gurgling millwheel's happy race.
And oft she tends the rambling rose,
That 'lone, its gnarléd thorn-stem close
Against the latticed window holds,
Quaint lattice that the sunlight golds.
Each crimson rosebud doth she watch
With tender care, as if to catch
Each breath that wafts unto the mill
Its essence o'er the lattice sill.

Dalmar, daughter of the mill, is she.

Was e'er a maid so fair?

Search the world o'er as you will, as she,—

So sweet, so kind, you ne'er

Can find again. So fair, that when

The winds caress her nut-brown hair,

That waves and curls as if to dare

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

The gentle zephyr's blowing, and
The sunlight turns, with magic hand,
The lighter strands to flowing gold,
That, gleaming, gleaming, on the bold
Wind streaming, seem a network wire,
A diadem of golden fire;
And 'neath this mass, a wealth of grace,
So pure, so kind, so sweet a face,—
Is't wonder that her figure fills
The heart with fervent passion's thrills?

Brow like the rosebud's dreamy whiteness,
 Soft as the faintest dawn;
Framed by the golden, curly brightness,
 Smooth o'er the eyebrows brown.
Cheek, in the heartblood's surging lightness,
 Full with its changing grace;
Lips of that faint carnation redness
 Lent to an innocent face.
From out whose eyes, whose blueness vies
Celestial splendors of the skies,
There peeps a soul, so pure, so true,
A gem that makes this liquid blue
Its favorite abiding place;
And frequent lights this pretty face,
As if from Northland in its flight,
Did steal forever for these eyes,—
Quintessence of Aurora's light,—
The brilliant flashfire of the skies.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

One day, as sun is sinking low,
And down the road, thus driving slow,
A lad with yoke of oxen takes
His way and, shouting careless, makes
The echoes answer to his "Gee" and "Whoa!"
And leaning on the handle of his hoe,
Out in the wheat-field near at hand,
The lazy peasant wipes his brow;
And by the roadside, in the sand,
A chubby urchin, scanty clad,
Doth build a sandhill castle grand,
And, laughing, mocks the barefoot lad,
There comes at once a different sound,
As clatt'ring hoofs beat on the ground;
And from the distant hilltop, where
The bending road and trees so fair
Cut off all else from view, a knight
Appears. His steed, a pearly white,
Foam-flecked as o'er the road he speeds
So proud, still scarce the bridle heeds.
His mane and tail, a tawny white,
Stream wild upon the breeze, and quite
In keeping with this beauteous steed,
His silver trappings, fine indeed,
But add to make a perfect horse.
Forsooth, as though some magic force
Did steal a picture from its frame,
Endow with breath and life the same;
Restore the fire to the eye;
Bring down his spirit from the sky;
Nor mar the beauty of the paint,

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

The silver cloth, the trappings quaint.
And yet, in praising of his steed,
Shall we forget the man, indeed?
In perfect ease and careless grace,
He fits full well the rider's place.
His cloak is white of satin fair
And plain, in simple taste, save where
In threads of gold the border scroll
Is woven in the cloth; and plain
Around the neck, a golden chain
Doth hold the cloak in place;
And with the horse's flying pace
The bordered cloak doth frequent fail
To hide his bright chain-coat of mail.
Pure white, a pluméd feather streams,
And visor raised, beneath there seems
A face that tells of manhood true;
His eyes a frank and laughing blue;
A smile that tells his happy mien,
And from the helmet's edge there e'en
Doth steal a naughty, yellow curl.
There from above the winds unfurl
The pennant from his pointed lance.
From shining shield the sunbeams glance.
The pennant's shimm'ring, silken white
Doth flaunt in golden letters bright
A legend to the skies, and see,
Amid the shield's bold blazonry,
The curious read, so plain, so fair,
These words, "I seek the fairest," there.



*Then reins, forsooth, his restless steed
Within the dooryard of the mill.*

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

The lad makes way to let him by
In trembling haste, nor takes his eye,
In wondering gaze, from off the pair.
The farm hand looks with wide-eyed stare
And dolted, open-mouthed surprise.
The child deserts his sandhill toys,
Half fearful, yet with curious gaze.
The silver sheen and noise amaze
Him. 'Tis a new thing to his eye.
And quite prepared to laugh or cry,
In wonderment, he stands thus still.
And e'en fair Dalmar at the mill
Doth turn around, so strange this sound.
As meets her eyes this fairy twain,
She too doth stare and stare again;
And from her innocent blue eyes
Her frank admiring gaze doth steal,
As 'twere a prince from out the skies,
The hero of some fairy tale.

Nor all the maid's the wonder seems.
'Mid sylvan shades, the slanting beams
Of sunlight's setting, shimm'ring drifts,
And gleams, and strangely paints the rifts
Amid the parapet's torn ledge;
And keener outlines to the edge
The tower's form against the sky.
Nor lacks this splendid sylvan scene,
Where birds and trees and flowers vie
To make a perfect picture dream,

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Its queen,—for 'mid the setting e'en
Fair Nature's brightest jewel-gleam
Is placed;—as, bashful by the lattice sill
There stands fair Dalmar of the Mill.
Amid the ringlets of her hair
And 'round her graceful figure fair,
And too, caressingly beneath her chin,
The sunlight plays; and soft within
Her sunlit face, revealed, there lies
The beauty of her mild surprise.
Within her hand she careless holds
A new-plucked, budding, crimson rose.

He slows his pace, he slacks his speed,
Then reins, forsooth, his restless steed
Before the dooryard of the mill,
Where Dalmar, shy, her heartbeats still,
Amazed, doth breathless, wondering, stand.
With grace inborn, a knight indeed,
Dismounts he from his fiery steed,
And o'er his neck, with careless hand,
He throws the horse his bridle rein.
'Tis but a moment's time and then
He doffs his helmet to the ground,
And, bowing low,—the while the sound
Of silver spur and golden chain,
At every motion, chime again,—
He speaks these words, nor waits to pause;
With outstretched hands he pleads his cause.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

“Behold! A courtier of the realm
Am I. Ne’er felt my heart a care.
Through torrid lands and countries bleak
I seek the fairest of the fair.
My task is done, my goal is won.
Aye, verily, than thee, to me
None fairer can there ever be.
Be mine, I worship thee!
Be mine, I love but thee!
Thou shalt not want, thou shalt not care;
Be mine, thou fairest of the fair!”

The maid looks down quite bashfully.
Ne’er other man had spoke as he.
“Nay, nay, Sir Knight, bethink thee, pray,”
Saith she, “what thou art saying. Nay,
Art thou but jesting? At the most,
Kind sir, ’tis but a sorry jest
Thus lightly of thy love to boast.
Of me thou knowest naught, nor less,
My life. ’Tis but a simple girl,
A miller’s daughter here, whose world
Hath ever been this wooded place.
Who ne’er hath seen thy courtly grace,
Nor yet a knight or lady fair.
Methinks that she would poor compare,
Sir Knight, with these and ill would seem
At ease ’mid flashing light and gleam
Of jewels rare, and wine and feast,
And of thy courtiers, e’en the least

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Would laugh to scorn thy country jade
That thou but now hast called a maid
Than whom, none fairer are to thee,
Yet ne'er hast seen before. Can't be
Thou fain would tempt me thus by gleam
And glitter of thy castle dream?
Thou speak'st but words, thou lov'st not me.
For shame!"

"Nay, nay! fair maid!" saith he,
"I jest thee not. Each word is true.
Why dost thou doubt? I love but you.
Must I, through patient, ling'ring days,
And sapient looks and sighing ways,
Bespeak thee, what in passion'd word
I would becry to all the world?
Is love the worse if 'tis revealed,
Or thought the manliest concealed?
Thou see'st the pennant on my lance;
The words are plain. As search, perchance,
Some knights the Holy Grail, so I,
Forsooth, the fairest search. Thus flies
My streaming pennant high in air.
I search the fairest of the fair.
Through kingly court, through castle grand,
'Mid Persia's famed, through Grecian land,
'Mid Spaniards dark and Saxons fair,
And Normans have I searched with care.
Though fair, indeed, some maids have been,
Some lacking grace, some flaw has e'en
Revealed to me that they were not



With outstretched hands he pleads his cause

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

The fairest, but in thee——”

“Say not,
Sir Knight. ’Tis but a moment’s dream,
Thy fancied love. Thou scarce hast seen
Me, yet thy fancy runs so wild.
Bethinks thee, sir,” she says and smiles,
The while she looks demurely down,
Then meets his glance with laughing frown;
“Must I, because thou lovest me,
Return thy love? But, verily,
Believe thee can I not, that in
A moment’s time——”

“’Tis true, within
The hour have I seen in life
The maid Fate’s chosen for my wife,—
Yet oft in sleep I’ve dreamed thy face,
And oft, through reverie’s changing grace,
I’ve wooed the image of my dreams;
And when I see thee there, it seems
As thou art not so strange. Ah, do
Not chide! My passioned words are true.
These have I spoken often when
I’ve dreamed of thee. Is’t wonder, then,
That I should speak them now? And dare
I not one hope that thou dost care
A trifle, too, for me? Recall
Thy words and say to me, for all
My love thou givest me a hope.
Just one, I beg, one single hope!”

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

“And wouldst thou have me leave my home,
These woods, these flowers, all my own,
My father here, whose toil and care
Hath kept me safe, his daughter dear,
His child, his life, his all? How could
I leave him thus alone? Nor would
He hear unto thy suit, Sir Knight.
Oh, listen but to me aright!—
Betake thee now upon thy way
And speak not to my father, pray.
Thou little know'st how stern he be
When aught is spoke, e'en jestingly,
That I be loved, or, loving, may
Belong to other heart some day.
So is his heart wrapped up in me,
He will but answer angrily.
Didst thou—Oh, sir, it is no jest.”

He smiles and, hesitating lest
She say too much, she stops, confused,
Her cheeks with rose-matched hues infused,
The knight, with bold yet curious smile,
Hath listened patiently the while,
And, reading in his glance half caught,
Suspensions of an inner thought,
She speaks again:—

“Sir Knight, and know,
Though as thou lov'st, I loved thee so,
I would not thwart my father's will,
And he refuse, abide here still,

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

E'en though the world be at my feet.
Abide his word, nor think it meet
Without his blessing to depart,
E'en though the yearning broke my heart."

"Nay, nay," he speaks, "I ask not that."
And sweeps the ground with feathered hat,
Though tell-tale twinkling in his eye,
To wiser ones his words belie.

"I pray thee take me to thy sire,
That I make known my one desire.
Refuse me not, oh fairest one!
But grant that I may say I come
From thee to ask this boon for both.
Thy sire shall have fair lands, forsooth,
And in the castle live with thee,
In wealth and ease and luxury.
Come, princess of my heart, wilt say
That if I will thus speak, I may?"

And Dalmar, standing there so still,
Unwilling, bending to his will,
A newness burning in her heart
That singed her cheek until it smart,
A racing in her veins that thrilled,
That laughed, that danced, that yearned, yet filled
Her with dismay; that seemed to say,
"Joy! Joy! O yield thee, Dalmar, pray,"
Yet held her back, drew down her eye,

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Suffused her cheek, a crimson spy
That told the tell-tale heart's desire,
As though 'twere cried by some town crier,—
Lifts up her eyes to his tense face,
Takes courage from his smile to place
That rose into his hand, which, since
His coming, she had held. Pretense
Enough for downcast eyes, a place
In which to hide, surprised, her face,
But now,—as answer to his prayer,
A token rose she places there
Into his hand.

One moment still,
Then darts she swift into the mill
A-trembling at her boldness, all
A-quiver at her deed;—So tall,
So fair a knight, so brave a steed,
Knight errant of her dreams, indeed;
Yet, when in shelter safe she hides,
A trembling fawn, her conscience chides
Her heart for its rash deed.

And still,
As strides the knight into the mill,
She listens to his every word,
For through the wall each sound is heard.

Surprised at such a visitor
Thus striding through the open door,
The miller pauses where he stands,

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Then quick reprized, extends his hands
Still white with meal. "A welcome, sir,
A hearty welcome, sir," he says.
"O worthy knight, what varied ways
Have brought thee to this rambling mill?
Thou 'rt 'cross a hospitable sill.
Behold, yon sun hath sunk to rest;
I beg thee, yield to my request,—
Nay! Do command! (For evening's hand
Hath turned the mill to castle grand.)
As king, I bid thee share the feast,
To grace the board as honored guest,
And bide you here till morrow's sun
Shall mark the day anew begun."

"Kind sir," the knight begins, "though fain
I would thy cheer partake, refrain,—
Unless thou grantest my request.—
I must——"

"'Tis granted ere 'tis asked,
Sir Knight!" the miller cries.

"Not so,
Kind sir," the knight replies, "for know,
Sir Reginal De Guise am I,—
A knight of high degree am I,—
Nor lacking castles fair, nor lands,
Nor halberdiers, nor vassal hands,
Nor gold, nor aught of jewels rare;—

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Ah, lacking but in one thing fair.
So to my castle vowed to bring
Its one and beauteous lacking thing;
Self-doomed to nomad life,—to grace
No feast beneath a roof,—nor place
My head upon a pillow till,
O miller of this mystic mill,
As blazoned on my buckler there,
I find the fairest of the fair!"

The miller gasps. Before his eyes
His hands he clasps. Then, as defies
A desp'rate man his foe, he turns
To speak,—and then grows weak, as burns
Within his heart the thought that he
Hath guessed.

"Oh, sir, the fairest be
Thy daughter, here," the knight exclaims.
"The finest lands in my domains
Shall be to her a dower, and
The palace of De Guise shall be
To her a fairy flower-land.
And, lest I seem to you too bold,
Behold this token rose I hold!
It is a passport,—hers,—to say
That if I will thus speak, I may."

The miller makes as if to speak,
But when he sees the rosebud, weak

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

He turns his face away ; then shakes
His fear from off his heart and makes
His tongue obey.

“Thou know’st, Sir Knight,
Not what thou ask’st. The evening light
Hath glamored ’fore thine eyes, a face
Which morrow’s sun will soon deface.
For twilight’s vague, romantic hour
Reveals to thee a flower
Well set amid this silver glade,
Yet plucked, will pale, its beauty fade.”

“But, sir,” the knight rejoins, “for aye
Thou canst not keep her here, and may
Not ill befall her in this land
Where might doth rule with iron hand?”

“Nay, sir,” the miller says, “I fear
Me not. She’s but a child, a dear
Unthinking child, who ne’er a thought
Of love hath dreamt, Sir Knight, or aught
Of love hath felt. A merest child,—
A hoyden,—laughing, romping, wild.
Come, sir, I bid thee cease this talk.
Ah! There! It is the chiming clock
That marks the dinner hour.
Forget thy quest, this rustic flower.
Again I bid thee rest thee here.
The nights are cold, yon forest drear.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Come, sir, a cheery meal and wine,
And afterwards, some good pastime
To while away the night."

De Guise

In this far, rambling speech doth see
His suit is far from won. Yet still,
So pleads this miller of the mill,
Despairing, though, his word to win,
He hesitates. His hopes within
This mill are hid. Accept he will.
Perhaps 'twill be vouchsafed to still
His heart, a sight of Dalmar there,
So sweet, so kind, so pure, so fair,
Perhaps,—his heart gives one wild leap,—
The chance may come, when he may peep
Again into those eyes and hold
Her slender hand in his, and bold
May whisper love words in her ear.
If not,—at least she would be near,
To look, to speak,—behind his back,
Perchance, to dart a glance.

"Alack,

Kind sir, accept I must," the knight
At last replies.

"Aye, chosen right!"

The miller cries. "Come; waste no words;
The feast is groaning on the boards."

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

But reckons not aright when he
Thus speaks, for Dalmar, tremblingly,
Hath listened to their words, whose task
Had been to deck the boards. Alas!
As they come in, unto her shame,
The task is but begun. And red
Her cheeks, downcast—as words unsaid—
Her tell-tale eyes confess their guilt,
As hurr'ing to and fro, fear held,
She places quick the meal.

But ne'er
The miller heeds her glance, nor fair
The blushing crimson of her cheek.
Unto the knight he speaks, who, meek,
Distraught, unthinkingly doth stare,
Where'er she goes, at Dalmar fair.

And through the meal, this maid, this knight,
Exchange their glances o'er the light.
Awakening 'neath her liquid eyes,
The White Knight's courage seems to rise.
He quaffs the wine as though 'twere ale
And tells full many a stirring tale
Of joust and knight and lady fair,
Of Palestine and countries rare,
Of Moors and Danes, of Celtic might;
Describes to them a Roman fight.
He tells of castle, moor and fen,
The craggy peak and lily glen,

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

But most of all of castle hall,
With trophies hanging on the wall,
That tell the prowess of De Guise;
Extols its wealth, its luxury,
Describes the trees, the brook, the park,
The cooing turtle-dove, the lark,
The prancing steeds, the lowing cow;
And paints a picture there, to grow
Within the mind of this poor child;
The while the miller's gestures mild
Applaud; and all his glances still
Search out fair Dalmar of the Mill
As though he yearned her in his arms
To fold,—protect her from alarms,—
Distress her never by one thing,
And nought to her but pleasure bring.

“Come, sir,” the miller says, at last,
When they had finished their repast,
“The night is young. If thou dost play,
I have the chess. In fine array,
We'll pit each piece against its kind.
Who shows the greater skill, we'll find.”

“Aye, miller of the mill,” the knight
Replies, “one game, by it abide.
I win, my banner in the air
I'll fling—the fairest of the fair
My bride. I lose, renounce my quest,
Take off this white and gilded dress

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

And sell my steed; in future ride
A black knight, sombre shield, astride
A steed as dark. A wager! Fill
The board, O miller of the mill!"

The miller, hesitating lest
Too much he wager with his guest
Doth pause, then half ashamed, he cries:
"I fear not. Fortune with me lies!"
And trembling, takes his arm-chaired place.
The knight opposes him with grace.
Fair Dalmar sitteth at his side,
By his tense words half terrified.

"A Lopez," cries the miller gay,
As brings the knight his men in play.
Thus, Knight and Knight, to left and right;
Then Bishop to the black Queen's Knight.

A moment pausing o'er the board
To see what choice the men afford,
De Guise doth linger musingly,
While Dalmar leaneth close to see.

Then Queen advances once her man.
The miller waits, the board to scan,
Then twice the Queen's pawn pushes on.
'Tis captured by his fellow pawn,—
Reprized by joust of Kingly Knight;
Then Black, recouping 'fore the fight

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Doth pause the Bishop 'fore the Queen
To pay his due respects, and then
The white Queen brings her Knight to serve
The Bishop's place and yet to swerve
To aid the pawn. Then Black, his Knight
Brings to the fray, and cautious White
A visit to his Castle pays
(The cunning of his game betrays),
Contented from this safe retreat
The sallies of his foe to meet.

While Dalmar's hand doth silent feel
Another hand 'neath covers steal.
A pressure thrilling through and through,
Which, tremblingly, returns she too.

And quick of thought, De Guise doth bring
The Bishop cowed before the King
To bear the coming battle's brunt.
(A strong, ecclesiastic front
They show, well flanked by Knights so brave,
As were they on parade, so grave.)
But ere 'tis done, the Queen's Knight's man
Doth twice spring forth into the van.

As thinks the miller musingly,
Then steals Sir Reginal De Guise
A loving look unto the maid,
Which she returns, though half afraid
That, had he not forestalled his play,
His chessmen soon had lost their way.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

The King of sombre aspect seeks
His Castle. That, a knowledge speaks
Of danger lurking near. And White,
Between the Castle and the Knight
Doth bid the Bishop take his place,
To urge each on, if slacks their pace,
Or in retreat, to save the day.

But still De Guise divides the play
Between the board and Dalmar's face
And, looking quick, doth well to place
The Knight beside his master's Queen
(To kiss her queenly hand), and e'en
As 'twere a signal, opes the play.
The miller, wise, begins the fray.
The Knight takes Knight and Bishop Knight,
White Bishop aids the pawn. The fight
Goes merry, merry on, for pawn,
The Queen's, steps forth; then pawn takes pawn.
The Bishop takes. Then Knight again
Retakes the Bishop and the Queen
Retakes the Knight.

Ah, Dalmar's face,
Sir Knight, hath lured thee with its grace.
Thou'lt find in squeezing hands, in sighs
And looking into liquid eyes,
No rules for chess.

“Sir Reginal,”
The miller cries, “thou'st lost it all!

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

The Queen's En Prize, dost see?" and then
Before his eyes, the Bishop e'en
Doth take the Castle's pawn. "'Tis check,
And must thou move thy King. I take
The Queen."

"'Tis lost," the knight replies.
Then comes again before his eyes
The picture of his hope; doth seem
As Dalmar stands there in a dream.
But quick reprized, his face he steels
And, rising from his place, he feels
As palsied are his limbs. "Kind sir,"
He says, "'tis fate, the chessmen were
The test. Resolved I am to take
Their meed. Before it is too late
I take the lonely road. Persuade
Me not, for my resolve is made."

As e'en the miller begs De Guise,
The more resolved he seems to be;
And when the miller sees he can
Persuade him not, as man to man,
He takes his hand and to his guest
He speaks. "Though I do thy request
Deny, Sir Reginald De Guise,
Thyself hath pleased me verily.
Yet 't seems 'twere wise. In after days
Thou'lt see the wisdom of my ways.
A kind farewell. May blessings, sir,
Be on thy way. But wait, before
You go,—yes, Dalmar, bring the wine.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

That portion for yourself, this mine.
The glass hold high and drink the toast,
Forgive the miller-king his boast,—
Then drink, lad, to the castle mill,
When night is here and all is still.
Ho for the time when eve doth bring
My realm! For 't night I am a king!"

The knight his glass holds high in air,
Then silent drinks to Dalmar fair.
"Farewell, a kind farewell!" he cries,
Addressing Dalmar with his eyes.
He picks his helmet from the floor,
Takes up his shield there by the door,
Then sudden, falls his wandering glance
Upon his gold bespangled lance.

"Ah, this shall be to thee a gift,
Fair Dalmar of the Mill," and swift
He places it into her hands.
"A gift, e'en though in foreign lands
I wander far, that thou mayst know.
As loves no man, I love thee so.
Reminder may it be that I am true.
My heart I leave with thee, and too,
If e'er in need of my strong arm
To shield thee aught from any harm,
From yonder turret, mounting high,
Wilt flaunt this standard to the sky?
Perchance fair Fate on that dire day
Shall lead my wandering steed this way!"

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Then standing in the doorway still,
Bespeaks the miller of the mill:
"The game, kind sir, with two false plays
Hath lost to me my hopes," he says,
"But know, as chessmen in the game
Play fickle on the board, the same
Doth Fortune with her pawns and men.
And if ye see me e'er again,
'Twill be to come a champion knight
To claim fair Dalmar as my right.
Take heed! So far thou'st won the game,
Oh miller-king! Yet fortune e'en
May change, and in her future game
A Black Knight take the White King's Queen
And Bishop then, to end the play
With black-robed priests and grand array,
In canded chancel, sealed by Fate
And cowléd pomp, declare 'tis 'mate."

They hear him whistle to his horse,—
An answer whinny from the gorse,—
Then trampling hoof-beats on the ground,
And fainter, fainter grows the sound;
Then fainter still, and dies away.

Then hums the miller 'gain his lay,
Forgetting all his words have cost,
Rememb'ring but his merry toast,—
"Then drink, lad, to the castle mill,
When night is here and all is still."

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

But Dalmar there doth hide her eyes,
And in the darkness, child, she cries.
She presses to her troubled breast
The object of his one request.
She kisses each and every star
Upon its silken white, and far
Into the night well out her tears,
Till dreamland closes up her ears
To aught but that one sweetest word
Which he had whispered, she had heard.

Forsooth, and oft a knight doth sigh;
Alas! and oft a maid doth cry
When thinking of that summer day.
And oft a maid looks up the way
Where one had come for that short hour,
To woo the miller's budding flower.
And oft a knight doth kiss a rose
That, quaint, its gnarled thorn-stem close
Against a lattice window held.
Poor rose! How oft have tear-drops welled
To wet thy withered leaves!

A gold
And silken banner, legend bold,
Doth stand within a tower, pressed
Each day unto a maiden's breast.
Each starry letter, shining bright
Against the folds of silken white,
Have felt the touch of red lips true;
As loved he her, so love she too.

DALMAR

Daughter of the Mill

CANTO II.



HERE parapet and turret tower ;
Where battlement, as though some power
Did mark the battle's dread array ;
Or yet some mediæval fray

Did, mayhap, mar the massive wall
With battering ram or slingshot ball ;
Where latticed window's narrow space
Doth seem to mark the favorite place
Where archers sent their feathered shaft,
Or spearsmen showed their bloody craft ;
Where, 'round and 'round, the lazy moat,
Fed by the stream, doth seem to gloat
O'er carnage past and bloody strife,
Or days and nights thus ever rife
With shouts and laughter of the feast ;
Where creaking drawbridge to the East,
All seem to mark a castle grand ;
Where wassail lord his lowly band
Did ever rule with iron hand,
And serf to lordly will did bend,—
There rules Sir Redver Onverand,
A baron of the goodly time
When feast and battle-rout did chime

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

With joust and wine and women fair.
A bluff, coarse man, with lordly air.
And loud of voice, this worthy peer
Doth hold his serfs in cringing fear.

Within the hall there, every night,
Till sunbeams streak the morning light,
The shouting of the motley throng
Is heard. 'Mid wine and ribald song
They drink the night away, and gray,
The dawning of a beauteous day,
Oft finds a drunk, besotten lot
Asleep around an empty pot.

A jester in this castle hall
Must e'en perform with cap and ball:
A poor, misshapen, wizened thing,
Whose pranks and grimace faces bring
The laughter to their throats. His round,
Large head, his arms that touch the ground,
The hump upon his shapeless back,
His motley clinging like a sack,
The grimace of his face, low browed,
All seem a jest unto the crowd,
Who follow leading of their lord,
And banter, jesting, round the board,
The motley hunchback's queer array.
Nor lacks he repartee or play
Of words, or jest to flay the hide
Of duller men than he,—deride

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

The tipster, grimace to his face
And mock his mien with grotesque pace,
Or thrust a deep and scornful prod
To raise the laughter of the crowd.

The tipster's brawl, the ribald jest,
All hold for him a great disgust.
And tied, a henchman to this lord,
A poor, misshapen thing abhorred;
His life, indeed, doth seem to be
One long drawn, dreadful misery.
Is't wonder that on leisure days
A visit to the woods he pays,
Alone with Nature and her life,
Away from motley, bells and strife,
Or in his wanderings that his feet
A pathway to the mill should meet,
Or that his wizened shape, perchance,
Should meet fair Dalmar's careless glance?
In pity for this ugly man
She speaks as kindly as she can:
"Good sir, and can I help thee, pray,
Or aught can aid thee on thy way?"

"Sweet maid, my name is Conatassel;
The dwarf, I am, of yonder castle;
And if I may but rest me by
This step, the way is long,"—(a sigh
He heaves as he sits down)—"I will
E'en thank thee, if thou wilt but fill

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

A cup from yonder water's race,
That I may quench my thirst."

The face
Of Dalmar grows, with pity, sad,
And, hasting in the doorway, glad
To do a good, kind deed, doth fill
A glass of wine within the mill
And adds a sweet cake, golden brown,
A rare confection of her own.
She brings them to the dwarf and says:
"Pray tell me, sir, of their fine ways
That yonder in the castle dwell."

"Fair maid," he says, "it is as well
Thou knowest naught of castle grand,
Or yet, Sir Redver's ribald band.
O child, how little do you guess
What wrongs there are without redress!
Come, let us talk of other things,
The woods, the birds, fair-winged things."

And thus begins a friendship 'tween
The dwarf and Dalmar fair. As e'en
The weeks grow into months, a day
Scarce passes that his steps that way
The jester does not wend. And too,
The miller likes the man'kin who
Within his dwarfed exterior
Doth hide a mind superior.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

The chessmen often wend their game
Across the miller's checquered plane.
Fair Dalmar treats him like a child,
A wizened shape with eyes so mild.
Caressingly she pets his hand,
Or turns, with careless mien, the band
That marks him bounden to his lord,
Or twirls his dagger that his sword
He calls.

 The jester dwarf, alack,
Doth carry 'neath his peaked back
A heart that throbs, a man's, and each
Caress so light bestowed doth reach
His tender soul and sear it deep
With burning love. His days, his sleep,
Are all beset with her fair face,
Her voice, her eyes, her figure's grace.

And Dalmar, fair, sweet, innocent,
Ne'er guesses this poor jester's bent.
She grows each day more fair to see.
Ofttimes her thoughts are on De Guise,
But thinks of him as one in some
Far-distant time, again to come,
A prince in an enchanted vale,
The hero of her fairy tale.

The jester, wand'ring 'neath the trees,
Fair Dalmar 'mid the shadows sees.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

He calls her name and soon the pair
Together gather flowers fair.

"And why, my Conatassel," saith
The maid, "dost thou seem so distraight?
What sombre thought has ta'en away
Thy smile and jest, this summer day?"

"Ah, Dalmar, child, thou knowest not,
What wicked, twisted, motley thought
My mind encompasses. Ah, child,
This cap and bells will set me wild!
A jester fool am I; the butt
Of yonder Lord Sir Redver's wit.
I caper, screw my face awry,
A poor, tormented jester daff,
To twist each moment's agony
Into the semblance of a laugh."

She puts her arms around his neck,
Caressing his poor hair, but quick
He throws her arms away and fierce
Upon her turns. His dark eyes pierce
Her mild surprise. In rage he speaks:
"Why do you pet me so? What makes
You put your arms around me, treat
Me as a child? This heart doth beat,
Though in a carcass built so mean,
As true as any man's and e'en
Can feel, can love, can worship thee!

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Ah, Dalmar child, and canst not see
My heart, my soul is thine,—and though
My body's shapeless, ugly, so
Is not my soul? Ah, Dalmar, dear,
Look not away, nor show this fear
Of my poor, fervent pleading! Say
Thou dost not hate me, Dalmar, pray!
I cannot help I love thee, child;
I've fought it day by day," and wild
He falls upon his knee. "I love
Thee as a being far above
Me. Nay, repulse me not, but say
Thou wilt forget the outer clay
And see the inner man,—a heart
That beats but for thyself apart,
A soul built up of one fair scene,
A life in which thou art the queen."

But Dalmar, listening scarce unto
His words, doth stand a-trembling through
The fear of this fierce dwarf. She thought
Him but a child. Her mind ne'er sought
The reason of his coming there.
She pitied him, she stroked his hair;
She put her arms about him as
She would a lad or country lass,
Who, hurt, did need a min'string kiss
To cure, or mayhap, a caress.

Before this wizened man, whose eyes

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

So fierce her sweet soul terrifies,
Whose passion tense distorts his face
Into a hideous grimace,
Whose long, thin arms and ape-like hands
Like ten'cles seem, she trembling stands
And then springs like a hunted deer
From this new, incarnated fear.
And when he calls to her to stay,
She pauses long enough to say:
"Oh, leave me! Go! I hate you! Go!
I cannot love, I hate you so!"

Then speeding to her father's mill,
She rushes to the turret still,
The banner snatches to her breast
And weeps, with fear and rage suppressed.
That such an one of love should speak,
A hideous hunchback, ugly, weak!
She presses to her lips the white,
Bespangled banner of the knight;
Compares to him, so brave, so true,
This dwarf. In rage none can subdue,
As to her mind the knight appears,
She sheds a flood of bitter tears.

Nor blame the dwarf, so sensitive,
That he should to his rage o'ergive.
In one so dwarfed, the mind, perchance,
Is wounded by the self-same lance
Of Fate that marred the twisted form.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

A body that is so ill born
Doth taint, mayhap, the inner mind.
In judging rightly, we shall find
The small man, wizened, weak, doth e'en
Display a strong, revengeful mien,
While larger men, with richer blood,
Forgive and leave revenge to God.

As though fair Fate had willed the deed,
Is ne'er a fairer chance to need.
For when he comes unto his lord,
In jest, Sir Redver raps the board.
The throng stands up from left and right,
As though to honor some great knight.
With jesting bow and mocking bend
Begins Sir Redver Onverand:
"A welcome, fair and gallant Conatassel,
Unto our land and goodly castle.
Why dost thou wander o'er the land
And shun this hale and hearty band?
Mayhap, good sirs, I wot 'tis so,
Some country maid he goes to woo."
At that, a merry laugh bursts out
From every blear, half-drunken clout.

The jester, trembling in his fear,
Doth cast about with sullen leer,
For aught to aid him from this wrath,
Or to some other turn the laugh.
A sin'ster thought his mind tempts on.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Another moment and 'tis done.
"Sir Redver," saith the manikin,
"I did but listless wander in
The woods of yonder silver vale,
But if thou'lt listen to my tale,
Which thy fair words doth bring to mind,
In wandering there, I e'en did find
O'er yonder vale, a rustic mill.
A common sight it is, but still,
As I did draw a-near to it,
Forsooth, to rest a little bit,
A maid came forth, so sweet, so fair,
With bluest eyes and nut-brown hair.
Nay, nay, sirs, such an one is not for me,
But good Sir Redver, verily,
Forgive the word of Conatassel,
An one to grace this goodly castle."

"Good sirs," Sir Redver laughing cries,
"A jesting fool doth me advise
A miller's daughter take to wife,
A country jade, upon my life,
A plump, round, bouncing maid, I wist,
Tied round as were she sack of grist."

"Nay, nay, Sir Redver; hear me, pray,
My head be on it, what I say,
As such an one you ne'er have seen
In courtly lady, maid, or queen."

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

“Sirrah, what nonsense dost thou say?
I’ll take thee at thy word this day.
Odds blood, and hath she not the grace,
Nay, fairer is she not of face
Than any maid that I have seen,
Surpassing beauty of a queen,
Then thou wilt answer for it, sir!”

“’Tis done, Sir Redver, ’sooth, and were
She here, forgiven would I be
For all this praise. Aye, verily,
My head be on it.”

“Hear, good sirs,
What this poor, jesting fool avers.
Go, bring the miller to this hall.
Soon we shall see what shall befall.”

The miller pale, with face distraught,
His mind disturbed with anxious thought,
Is brought before this ruddy lord.
“Know, miller, sir, and we have heard,”
Sir Redver suavely speaks, “that in
Thy rustic mill, ’mid sack and grain,
Hath grown a beauteous, witching maid,
Forsooth, to whom, when all is said,
None other can compare. Aye, fair,
With bluest eyes and nut-brown hair,
A maid with grace and queenly ways,
So saith the bard who sings her praise.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

We bid thee bring before our eyes,
This beauteous maid, this queenly prize.
Forsooth, and doth she suit our taste,
Our time we shall no further waste
By looking for another, sir,
But honor thee by making her
The mistress of this goodly castle.
Aye, what say ye, my Conatassel?"

The miller looks around in fear
And scans the jester's trembling leer.
He wipes his brow, scarce knowing, says:
"My daughter, sir, is yet, in ways,
A merest child. She lacks the grace,
The courtly ways, to fill a place
In thy grand castle here, and sir,
I trust thou wilt not think of her.
Bethink thee of some maid more fair
And leave the child still in my care."

"What! Wilt thou thwart my plan?"
Sir Redver cries. "I do command!"

"Nay, sire," his face with rage infused,
The miller cries, "I do refuse
To bring my child to be thy sport,
With such a drunken rake consort,
E'en though he maketh her his wife."

Sir Redver chokes with rage. "S life!"

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

He cries. His eyes stick from his head.
"What means this lout?" His face turns red.
He chokes and gasps to gain his breath.
"With such a drunken rake! 'Sdeath!"

His lips turn white, his eye-balls roll,
And Death had nearly claimed his soul.
They bring him wine, they ease his neck;
Reprized, he holds himself in check.

"Sir, miller, lout," he cries suave,
And thou wish to escape the grave!
'Sdeath! Thou'dst best obey my will.
Make ready then this hour, thy mill,
To greet this goodly company.
What say ye, sirs? Aye, verily,
We shall attend a wedding there;
The miller's daughter, called so fair,
And yonder comely Conatassel,
Our valued jester of this castle.
And know, O miller, but a jest
Shall be her marriage at the best.
In tawdry motley shall it be
Proclaimed a cowléd mockery.
Aye, wedded, yet ne'er wed. 'Tis well.
Within my castle shall she dwell.
So here's to jester's wife to be,
We'll drink, sirs, to her chastity."

The miller's raging knows no bound,
His moving lips give forth no sound.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

And when, at length, they lead him 'way,
He musters breath enough to say:
"And thou dost carry out thy threat,
Sir Redver, know, my mind is set;
Protect her with my life I will,
And ere I die, shall one lie still.
Aye, sir, her blood be on thy head;
Than see her thus, I'll see her dead!"

Sir Redver, laughing at this speech,
Again, doth for the wine pot reach.
"Methinks, a merry time's in store,
Until we've settled with this boor.
A threat, kind sirs, an idle threat,
This miller's bravery. And yet,
Mayhap, a maid that's prized so high
Will be a jewel worth the try."
With that he drinks the tankard down.
"What, wilt thou speak, thou jester clown?"

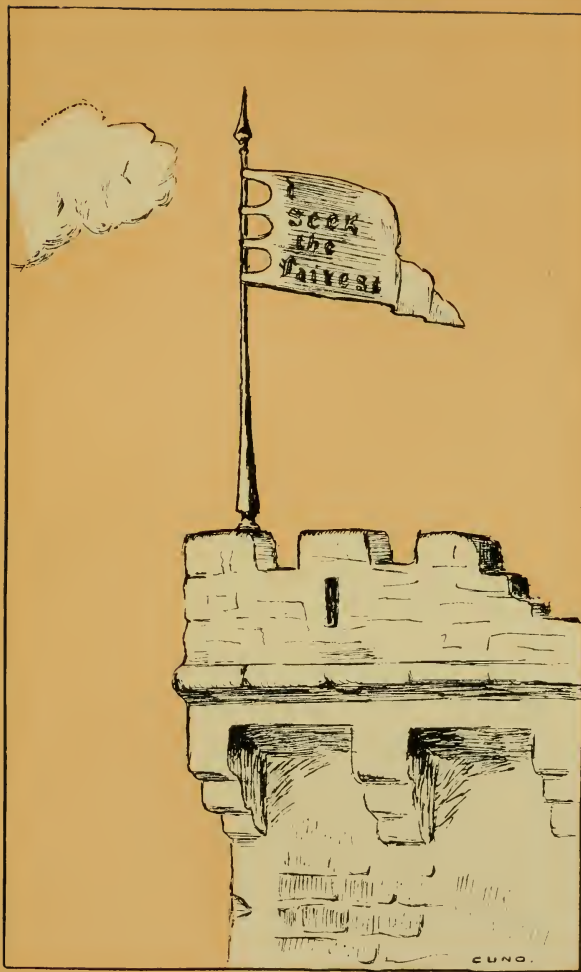
"Oh, sir," the jester says, his thought
By his desire great distraught.
All eagerly he wants to aid
To gain, as wife, this beauteous maid,
Ne'er dreaming, in Sir Redver's mind
What sin'ster thoughts there lurked behind
When he had made her jester's wife,
"Tis true, this miller with his life
Will guard the honor of his child.
I know the man, his courage wild.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

There is a pathway through the wood,
While he will take the longer road.
If I o'erreach him to the place
And bar the door before his face,
The game is won. Or need it be,"
He taps his dagger knowingly,
"And do I win, a signal will
I hoist above the rustic mill.
And you, with all your men, will be
Beneath the hill, and when you see
The signal, haste to gain the day."

"A plotter," cries Sir Redver gay,
"Who anxious, plots to gain his bride.
'Tis well. Then haste and we will ride.
Ho! Varlet, bring my trusty steed.
Now, sirs, another glass of mead,
Then do we follow. Ah, my sword,
And are we ready? 'Pon my word,
I'd near forgot. The monk, thou boor,
Go fetch the monk and quicker o'er
Will be the wedding hour. Sirs,
My shield, my helmet and my spurs."

They leave the hall, a motley throng,
While hastes the dwarf the path along.
His brain, afire with this deed,
Doth urge him on with greater speed.
And on the road the miller hastes,
His pent-up rage to air he wastes,



*It was, forsooth,—what curious chance!—
Sir Reginal's fair, bannered lance.*

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Nor thinks, nor plans, but hastens still,
His one great need to gain the mill.

And such the angry miller's speed,
Before the dwarf, as is his need,
He gains the doorstep of the mill.
He bars the door, while o'er the sill,
That rose-decked window sill, climbs in
The ugly dwarf. When once within,
With cat-like tread and dagger drawn,
Thus stealthily he creeps upon
The miller, who, his back turned still,
With double bars makes fast the mill.

Her father hastening to greet
Fair Dalmar, in the doorway meets
This treachery. Ah, wounding wide,
The dagger strikes the miller's side
Before her piercing scream can reach
His ear, and, crimson in the breach,
His life-blood rushes out. Her cry,
As to her father she doth fly,
The jester fills with awful fear,
And quickly up the turret stair
He runs and bars the door. But she
Moans o'er her sire, caressingly,
Who seems so limp, as were he dead,
Nor heeds the dwarf, who o'er her head
Is palsied. Fear convulsed he stands;

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

And as unclasps and clasps his hands,
A moan comes from the room below,
And then the sound of sobbing low.

Remembering, then Sir Redver's band,
He grasps what first comes to his hand.
It is, forsooth,—What curious chance?—
Sir Reginal's fair-bannered lance!
He rushes up the turret high,
Unfolds unto the pearly sky
The snow-white banner of De Guise
And plants it bravely to the breeze,
While down the hill and round the bend
There comes Sir Redver Onverand.
He leads a motley band indeed,
Astride a noble, snow-white steed.

Before the gateway of the mill
They pause. There all is still.
Fair Dalmar staunches, sad, the wound,
While he, recovered from his swoon,
Retells her all: Sir Redver's threat,
The dwarf, his own rash words, and, wet
With tears, her eyes still flash with fire,
As speaks she loving to her sire:
"O father! fear thee not that he
Will lead me to his revelry;
For, rather would I take my life,
Than for one instant be his wife!"

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Ere she hath done, a thund'ring shout
Fain tells Sir Redver is without.
"Ho! there within! We do demand
To open for thy lord!" They stand
In silence, but no sound they hear.
Then at the word they all draw near.
Together, then, with sudden cry,
Against the door their strength they try.
Once doth the door the throng withstand,
Then snaps the hinge's iron band.

The door falls in. They see within.
The setting sunlight, in a flood,
Streams slanting o'er the fallen door,
Where Dalmar staunches there the blood
That trickles to the oaken floor
Red from the wounded miller's breast,
But almost ere the door has crashed
And echoed through the raftered hall,—
As sudden, at their deed, they all
An instant awed and silent stand,—
She springs erect and in her hand
The red assassin's ghastly knife,
Still crimson with her father's life,
She holds aloft,—and tears the dress
From o'er her quiv'ring, heaving breast.

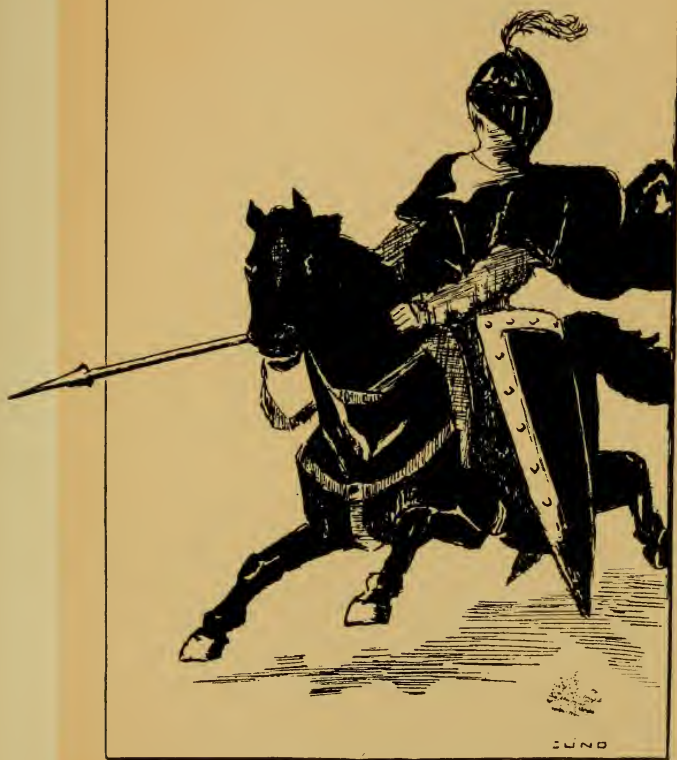
"Stand back!" she cries. "But one step more
And I will plunge this in my breast!
Sir Redver, step but there across that door,

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

A lifeless triumph at the best
Will be thy victory."

Aghast,
They silent stand. The dagger clasped
In quiv'ring hand, alone betrays
She lives. So still, in marble cast,
Sid Redver seems. Each menial stays
His breath in awe. None dare to breathe,
Lest then the quiv'ring hand should sheath
The dagger in her breast.

A cry,
Unsheathed to the listening sky,
Loud echoes, piercing strange from hill
To tragic setting 'round the mill.
"A champion!" cries the trembling maid,
And ere her words are fairly said,
A rider on a coal black steed
A-down the hill doth dashing speed.
Each step he cries his horse to haste
And faster falls his whip apace.
As speeds he on, his cloak of black
Waves wild upon the breeze, and black
The shield and helmet both betray
To none, "De Guise." He seems to sway.
His horse, exhausted, staggers down,
Yet slacks he not; again lays on
The whip, until, within their midst,
On foaming steed, he breathless sits,—



*A rider on a coal black steed
Adozen the hill doth dashing speed.*

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

His visor down, his rein now slack,
On sable steed, "A Knight in Black."

A moment thus, there, face to face,
Sir Redver and the knight their gaze
In silent wrath exchange. In scorn,
Sir Redver then, in words inborn
With hate to this strange man, exclaims:
"Sir Knight, of sombre hue, what claims
Have you to challenge me? What right
To champion thus a cause, or fight
For that which rightly I call mine?"

"Sirrah! What rightly thou call'st thine?"
The knight exclaims, as loosed from throat,
His sable cloak doth show his coat
Of bright chain mail. He tosses, bold,
His helmet to the throng. "Behold!"
He cries, and points up to the tower,
Where long within the passing hour,
The pennant streams in blaze of white,
"Seest thou those legend letters bright
Across that pennant's face?" And then
From shield he tears, from end to end,
The cloth that hides the steel from light,
And shows, emblazoned to their sight,
The pennant's self-same legend fair,
These words: "I seek the fairest," there.

"Doth question now my right to stand

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Defender from thy ruthless hand,
Sweet Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill?"

Sir Redver 'stride his steed sits still,
Then scornful smiles he at the knight,
As if to jeer his fancy's flight,
But ere he can, the knight, with grace,
Casts from his side his cloak, then throws
His gauntlet full into his face.
"I challenge thee to fight." He draws
His sword. Sir Redver crimsons 'neath
The blow, then quick his sword from sheath
Withdraws. The crowd, from left and right,
Make way to give them room to fight.

Black charger to the left and white
To right. Spurs to the black, Sir Knight.
Sir Redver's sword for a lash,
The white. Then, spring together, clash.
Each steel on shield, loud crash and crash.
Wheel to the right, both to the fight.
Oath from Sir Redver, shout, Sir Knight.

Bright streams his yellow hair, the breeze
Curling in ringlets fair, De Guise!
With visor down, Sir Redver on,
On to the fray spurs white his way!
Crash! Crash! Again! A shout, and then,
Ah, God! Glanced from shield, the Black,
Pierced to the heart, neighs, staggers back,

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Then falls, but ere he falls, the Knight,
Enraged, strikes out in angered might.
'Tis caught on shield, Sir Redver reels.
He reels, then grasps at mane. He reels,
"My God!" he calls, grasps wild, then falls.
Unhorsed, there both, each Sir Knight lies,
Then up Sir Redver to the fray,
But pinioned by his horse still lies,
Alas, Sir Reginal De Guise!

Fair Dalmar sinks upon her knees
And prays in fear, as draws he near,
Sir Redver to the knight there prone.
"I've won!" he cries, "Sir Knight, I've won!"
Then strikes a blow with might and main.
(For shame to strike him thus!) Again
His shield stands him in need, the knight.
The sword blade spends its two-hand might
Upon its steel. On charger's back
The glancing blade drives deep. The black,
In quiv'ring struggle starts with pain,
Then stiff in death, falls back again,
But ere he falls, De Guise, released,
Springs up, his strength and might increased.
They slash, they lunge, in battle plunge,
From left to right, around, around,
In circles o'er the millyard ground.
And ever cries the motley throng,—
"Sir Redver on! Sir Redver on!"
From front to back, from left to right,

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Sir Redver and the gallant knight,
From road to stream, then circling back,
Then o'er his corpse, the charger black.
On shield and steel in wild tattoo,
Sir Redver grim, but at each blow
That tells, the knight cries, "To the fight!
I serve the fairest! Ho, my blade!
Be true my blade! Well done my blade!"
And Dalmar there on bended knee,
Forgets to pray.

Shouts on the throng,
"Sir Redver on! Sir Redver on!"

She sudden springs to feet. "De Guise!"
She cries. "De Guise!" Above the noise,
The shouts, the clash, sounds clear her voice,—
"On, on! De Guise! On, on! DeGuise!"

He hears. It spurs him on to fight.
He strikes a blow with all his might.
He drives it home, past shield and guard,
To gorge, through gorge, through neck, through
gorge.

And headless stands Sir Redver there,
His shield still raised, his sword in air,
Then quivers, trembles; down he falls.
The visored helmet, head and all,
A ghastly object, rolls and rolls
Until it strikes the turret wall.

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

'Tis done! There o'er his foe, to breathe
An instant silent pauses he;
Then springs Sir Reginal De Guise
To where, again on bended knee,
The maid prays for her champion's might.
"Look, Dalmar, see!" He cries. And white
Her face, she looks up where his eyes
Meet hers, then springs erect and flings
Herself into his arms. She cries:
"Thank God! You win! You win!" and then
Forgetful till this moment, turns
To where the miller's life-flame burns
Thus fitful to its tragic end.
"O father! Father! Look!" she cries,
And kneels beside him where he lies.
"Look! Father! Look! The Knight De Guise
Is here, and I, thy Dalmar, see!
O father, speak!" she cries as tears
Well from her eyes. The miller hears
As in a dream. He stirs and sighs,
And turns his head, and pets her hair,
Then sees the knight still standing there,
As he had stood thus once before,
His figure in the open door;
His bright chain mail, his hair of gold,
That self-same smile, those eyes so bold;
But as he looks, the serfs without
Bring in his cloak, and round about
His frame he draws the cloth, and too,
His helmet fits upon his brow;

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

And visor down, transformed, the sound
Of his fair voice repeats each word
That, once before, these two had heard;
Unchanged, but that his coat of white
Has changed its hue to sombre night;
Unchanged his words of jest, forsooth,
But that he speaks them now in truth:

"As chessmen often in the game
Play fickle on the board, the same
Doth Fortune with her pawns and men,
And if you see me e'er again,
'Twill be to come, a champion knight,
To claim fair Dalmar as my right.
Take heed, so far thou'st won the game,
O miller-king, yet Fortune e'en
May change, and in her future game
A Black Knight take the White King's Queen,
And Bishop then, to end the play,
With black-robed priests and grand array,
In candeléd chancel, sealed by Fate
And cowléd pomp, declare 'tis 'mate.' "

The miller makes as if to rise.
He points his hand without and cries:
"Yon cowléd monk!" Then gasps in pain
And sinks unto the floor again.
The priest comes in and kneels to shrive.
To speak, the miller seems to strive.
"Not here," he gasps, "not here, but there;

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Unite in wedlock yonder pair.”
The monk turns in surprise and sees
Fair Dalmar standing by De Guise.
One moment only, hand in hand,
A few words spoken as they stand,
And then 'tis o'er, the deed is done,
Sir Reginal De Guise has won.

The miller's eyes, with glassy glare,
Around the mill-room seem to stare.
The rafter ceiling 'pears to rise
To doméd church-roof in his eyes.
His finger points out into space,
As though he sees it 'fore his face,
The candled chancel, bright with light,
The cowléd Bishop and the Knight.
Half raised, these words he speaks:

“As e'en
The Black Knight takes the White King's Queen,
And Bishop then, to end the play,
With black-robed priests and grand array,
In candled chancel, sealed by Fate
And cowléd pomp, declare 'tis 'mate.' ”

They bring him wine. He drinks it down,
But sees them not. His mind has gone
Back to that one and fateful night,
When first he saw the Knight in White,

Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

And sudden, left him his pain.
Those happy days are back again.
Upon his feet, they help him rise,
And swaying, weak, the miller cries,
As though he were their merry host,
The oft spoke words of his fair toast:

“Then drink, lad, to the castle mill,
When night is here and all is still.
Ho for the time when eve doth bring
My realm! For to-night I am a king.”

Aye, lay him down and ease his head.
Farewell, thou Miller-King! He's dead.

There dwells within a castle fair,
A lady sweet, with nut-brown hair.
Fair Dalmar of De Guise is she,
Far-famed of chivalry is she,
And bards that sing of those fine days
Oft tell the exploits of De Guise.

As for the dwarf, when they had sought,
With eyes fixed on the mill-yard court,
They found him standing, bowed his head,
His hands grasped o'er the sill,—and dead.
The miller was revenged indeed.
No earthly hand had wrought the deed.

The creaking millwheel, iron bound,

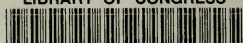
Dalmar, Daughter of the Mill

Hath long ceased turning 'round and 'round.
The rambling, rustic, castle mill
Doth stand, vine decked, in silence, still,
And o'er the latch lock, shining bright,
Some knowing soul did laughing write,
From scrolléd hinge, till latch begins,
This legend scrawl,

“THE BLACK KNIGHT WINS.”

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